TESTIMONY OF ELLEN LINDERMAN

HIGHWAY 52 FIELD HEARING
SENATOR KENT CONRAD

JULY 2, 2009

NORTH DAKOTA
Farmers Union

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TESTIMONY OF ELLEN LINDERMAN
FARMER, CARRINGTON, ND
TO THE U.S. SENATE BUDGET COMMITTEE
FIELD HEARING – HOW INFRASTURCTURE INVESTMENTS CAN
FOSTER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND THE AGRICULTURE ECONOMY:
HIGHWAY 52

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Ellen Linderman. I am a farmer and a district director for North Dakota Farmers Union. I have farmed with my husband Charles and our family in the Carrington area for the past 33 years. Over the years we have witnessed many changes in agriculture, but one thing has remained constant: the need for a good transportation system in our area so that agriculture can grow and thrive. This, in turn enhances the economic viability of our rural communities. An integral part of the transportation system in our area is Highway 52, as it runs diagonally across the state from north of Minot down to Jamestown where it connects up with Interstate 94. It runs through what I consider the agricultural heartland of North Dakota.

While we used to grow just a few crops such as wheat and barley on our farm, this is no longer true for us or our neighbors. We have expanded our crop diversity to include such things as corn, soybeans, sunflower, and other specialty crops. This was done for economic reasons as well as the increased availability of other crops that can now be grown in our region thanks to research and development. I have attached a list of the crops that can be grown in North Dakota, and I might add that there is ongoing research to hopefully expand this list to create even more economic opportunities for the farmers in our area. We are very good at producing a wide variety of crops.

Along with these new crops have come new challenges for our infrastructure system. For example, when we harvest corn, there is a lot more volume per acre than with wheat or other traditional crops. This means that there is more trucking from the field to the farm to the local elevator. As a result, most farmers have switched to using semi trucks for grain transport. Also as elevators have become larger and fewer, we often have to haul grain a greater distance to access the elevator. With a wider variety of commodities on the farm, more trips either to the local elevator or often to a processor at some considerable distance are required.

With these newer crops such as corn, there is also an increased need for inputs. While the inputs may be shipped via rail to certain points across the state, from there they are usually shipped by truck to local facilities and to farms. I might also add that the machinery, which has to be moved on roads from field to field, has become larger and takes up more of the road than it used to. Have you tried to pass a combine or a large tractor and farm implement lately? Roads have to be built wide enough to accommodate this machinery.

Even the local elevators with access to railroads end up shipping parts of their inventory by truck. Bulk commodities such as corn or wheat can be shipped on the large unit trains, but other commodities are not grown in a large enough quantity, or they may need to be segregated, and can't make use of the unit trains. These have to be shipped via our road system.

In some cases the end user of the commodity wants to know where it has originated. This requires the use of trucks to take the commodity from the farm storage to the processor or the cleaning plant for bagging and further shipment. We grow food grade soybeans on our farm. We contract them with SB&B Foods at Casselton, which is near Fargo. We have to store them on the farm until SB&B wants them. We were so thankful this spring for Highway 52/281 because there were only normal load restrictions in place so that we could move the beans when we needed to. We need to be a reliable supplier, as does SB&B, if we want to keep our customers happy. SB&B cleans, bags, and tags the soybeans and then puts them in containers which go to the West Coast where they are shipped to Japan for processing.

This winter we were among a group of soybean growers that traveled to Japan to visit with the processors there. We learned from them how important food safety is to the consumer in Japan. They want to know where there soybeans come from and they want to know how they were grown. We saw bags of soybeans from our farms with the attached labels that indicated their origin. I believe this is the future of agriculture in this global economy. Highway 52, if it is in good year-round condition, allows us to be part of that global economy in a way that we may not have even considered when we began farming 33 years ago.

SB&B is also considering contracting some identity-preserved wheat for shipment abroad. This again requires segregation so that the producer and the consumer are connected.

Those who grow potatoes in our area also know the importance of Highway 52. Again, they truck potatoes to Cavendish Farms, a processing plant near Jamestown on an as needed basis. This is also true of barley producers in our area who contract with the malting plant at Spiritwood.

We also grow confection sunflowers, which are sold in all of those little bags in convenience stores across the country for human consumption. We haul the seeds to the elevator, but the elevator usually trucks them to Grandin, ND for processing.

There is a canola crushing plant at Velva, ND. Some farmers in our area grow canola for shipment to that plant, but more is grown to the north and west of the plant.

While we are adept at producing a wide variety of crops, we have only begun to develop processing facilities, which would further enhance rural economic development. In Carrington we are fortunate to have Dakota Growers Pasta Company. It has provided

jobs for the community, but it has also provided a market for our durum wheat. Although some durum is grown in our area most of it is trucked in via Highway 52 from the northwest area of the state. Again, the durum is stored on the farm at harvest and then hauled in later.

There are all kinds of economic opportunities opening up in agriculture with the development of biofuels, identity-preserved crops, organic crops and even new types of feedstocks for livestock, which would enhance livestock development in the state. However, if we do not have a reliable transportation system all of the research and development in the world will not help us. We have to be able to ship our commodities on demand. If we are to develop processing plants locally, we need dependable roads. If anything, I expect to see an increase in the amount of agricultural goods shipped on our roads.

I consider Highway 52 to literally be a lifeline to connect us to the global economy. Without it our present progress may well wither and die, as we will be left in isolation from the global markets. With a well-built modern Highway 52 we will be able to maintain our connection to processors and world markets and then continue to build on what we have already accomplished.

CREC agronomy research addresses ND crop diversity

North Dakota 2007 Reported Acreage

Source: Farm Service Agency

• SpringWheat	6,536,000	• Oats	404,000
• CRP	3,382,000	• Flax	314,000
• Grasses (all)	3,273,000	• Sugar Beets	248,000
• Soybean	2,992,000	• Lentil	106,000
• Corn	2,505,000	• Potato	97,000
• Forages	2,106,000	• Navy Bean	95,000
• Durum	1,447,000	• Black Bean	44,200
• Barley	1,400,000	• Proso Millet	41,000
• Fallow	1,140,000	• Safflower	41,000
• Canola	1,077,000	• Mustard	32,300
• Sunflower	1,038,000	• Rye	17,600
• Alfalfa	564,000	• Chickpea	17,000
• Field Pea	511,000	• Other DEB	15,200
• Pinto Bean	496,000	• Buckwheat	14,300
• Winter Wheat	458,000	• Pink Bean	12,600